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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

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Friday, 15 April 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Gasso Matoses
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen; and Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to brief the Security Council once again on the latest developments in Yemen. This briefing falls on the eve of the next round of face-to-face talks in Kuwait, where I hope the parties will come to an agreement on a clear way to end the violence and devastation in Yemen.

As a result of months of intense negotiations, on 9 April I received letters from the Government of Yemen, the Ansar Allah and the General People's Congress, confirming their commitment to a nationwide cessation of hostilities. The cessation of hostilities began at midnight on 10 April, and I hope that it will provide an environment conducive to the upcoming talks, offer an opportunity for expanded humanitarian assistance, and provide a rare ray of hope to Yemenis longing for a return to peace.

The de-escalation and coordination committee established in the last round of peace talks in Switzerland has been working hard to prevent violations and avoid any military escalation. I commend the parties for their commitment to the work of the committee and thank the European Union, Germany, the Netherlands, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States for providing training to members of the committee and support for its operations.

The agreement on the cessation of hostilities also raised local levels of support. The Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah have nominated local committees in militarily contested areas to work with the de-escalation and coordination committee to ensure better compliance with the cessation of hostilities. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia bore witness to the signing of an agreement to form such committees upon the request of both parties. Most local communities are not yet fully functional, but we are working to ensure that they become more effective in the coming days.

The early days of the cessation of hostilities witnessed a notable decrease in the level of military violence in most parts of the country. However, there are have also been an alarming number of serious violations, particularly in Al-Jawf, Amran, Marib and Ta'izz. Fighting in Ta'izz continues to claim civilian casualties, and I am concerned that a spiral of escalating violence could threaten the success of the peace process. However, the events of the past two weeks have given me hope. I should like to acknowledge the courage displayed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah in agreeing to settle border disputes. Both parties confirm that these agreements pave the way for a general cessation of hostilities in Yemen.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has supported both the Government of Yemen and the Houthis in signing a landmark agreement aimed at supporting the cessation of hostilities and the work of the de-escalation and coordination committee, as well as the local de-escalation committees, and supports the role of the United Nations. The role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been praised by both parties, which represents an important positive development in the current crisis.

The humanitarian situation of the Yemeni people continues to deteriorate, causing additional human misery. As part of their commitments under the cessation of hostilities, the parties have pledged to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure unhindered access to humanitarian agencies. I call on all parties to support the important work being carried out by the humanitarian agencies. There is no doubt that humanitarian workers will do their utmost to deliver assistance to those in need, in particular in affected hard-to-reach areas. My colleague, Assistant Secretary-General Kyung-wha Kang, will brief the Council further on these efforts.

There is no doubt that Yemen's rapidly deteriorating economy is further undermining the humanitarian situation. In order to help Yemen maintain its economic stability in this crisis, I have also pursued agreements seeking to maintain the operations of key State institutions, including the central bank, on which many people depend. Re-establishing institutions like the Social Welfare Fund, which provides cash transfers to the most vulnerable sectors of the population, will help prevent the disintegration of the social fabric and extreme poverty and accelerate economic recovery once an agreement is reached.

On the security front, Yemen is facing a brutal war, on the one hand, and a significant terrorist threat, on the other. The Yemeni people continue to witness the devastation caused by terrorist attacks throughout the country. In my recent visit to Brussels, which suffered a tragic terrorist attack on 22 March, I noted that the absence of the State in many parts of Yemen has encouraged the expansion of terrorist groups, creating a long-term threat to the country. The current cessation of hostilities will help to create an environment more conducive to preventing further radicalization and violent extremism, but much more needs to be done in order to prevent irreparable damage to the future of Yemen.

I take this opportunity to note that this morning the Government of Yemen, supported by coalition forces, regained control of Al Hawtah, the capital of Lahij governorate, from Al-Qaida forces, which seized control of the city last summer.

My team and I have been engaged in extensive discussions over the past few months with Yemeni leaders and regional and international partners on the future direction of the country and possible outcomes of the Kuwait talks. I met with President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour four times, and wish to thank him for his support for my mission. I also met with senior Yemeni Government officials. I visited Sana'a several times for meetings with representatives of Ansar Allah and the General Popular Congress; His Royal Highness the Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud; the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan; and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia. I also engaged in telephone calls with the Foreign Ministers of France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, all of whom reiterated their support for the cessation of hostilities and the peace process facilitated by the United Nations. The success of the upcoming talks will require the consistent and coherent support of the region and the international community at large.

In a few hours, I shall leave for Kuwait in order to facilitate the next round of Yemeni peace talks. In that context, I should like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Kuwait, which has generously offered to host the talks. I also extend my thanks to the Sultanate of Oman for its political and logistical support for the efforts of the United Nations in the region. The talks will begin on 18 April and seek to reach a comprehensive agreement to end the conflict and allow the resumption of inclusive political dialogue, in accordance with resolution 2216 (2015) and other relevant resolutions. The talks will build on a negotiating framework that provides a mechanism for a return to a peaceful and orderly transition based on the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and the National Dialogue outcomes.

I will encourage the parties to the talks to negotiate a detailed way forward, starting with each of the following areas: the creation of interim security arrangements; the withdrawal of militias and armed groups; the hand-over of heavy weapons to the State; the restoration of State institutions and the resumption of inclusive political dialogue; and the release of prisoners and detainees. With these components, we are building on what has been discussed and agreed in principle in resolution 2216 (2015). This framework provides a strong foundation for developing a new political consensus that will help Yemen to achieve the stability and security that its people deserve and its future requires. A positive outcome will require difficult compromises on the part of all sides, as well as determination to reach an agreement. I encourage all sides to come to the talks in good faith and with a flexible attitude in order to reach a political solution and a final way out of the current crisis. The path to peace may be arduous, but it can be navigated.

Yemen is now at a crucial crossroads. One path leads to peace, while the other can only lead to a humanitarian and security crisis. The Security Council must maintain its support for Yemen and the peace process in the coming weeks, which will help Yemen to reach a comprehensive ceasefire and return to a peaceful, inclusive political process. I wish to thank all members of the Council for the trust and unyielding support in ensuring that the rights of Yemenis are well respected.

In conclusion, I would ask all Council members to dwell on this critical, historic moment. We have never been so close to peace. Will all parties rise to the occasion and genuinely engage in peace talks? Can they acknowledge their differences and agree to overcome obstacles? Can they drop their belligerent and destructive attitudes now that we are so close to peace? That is what we are asking for. We will have our answer in the coming days.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Cheikh Ahmed for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Kang.

Ms. Kang: I thank the Security Council for this opportunity to brief it on the latest humanitarian developments in Yemen on behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien.

We welcome the cessation of hostilities, which is a long-awaited respite at a time of appalling suffering and trauma in Yemen. More than 6,400 people have now been killed, and over 30,500 have been injured. Displacement has spiked, with some 2.8 million people having been forced from their homes. Livelihoods have been ravaged. Some 14.1 million people now need help accessing adequate health care as a result of a year of intensified conflict. The lack of supplies, medicines, electricity, fuel for generators, and staff or equipment have caused health services to decline across the country. Entire governorates have been engulfed in relentless violence. For example, in Ta'izz governorate, intensified fighting in and around Ta'izz City since mid-March has left scores of people dead and wounded and has also significantly hampered relief work.

Children have been particularly affected; they are among the most vulnerable in any society but they are all the more so in Yemen. Up until 10 April, when the cessation took effect, an average of six children had been killed or maimed in hostilities each day since March last year. Secondary effects of war and neglect also kill. UNICEF estimates that some 10,000 children under the age of 5 may have died in the past year from preventable diseases, and this in addition to the 40,000 children who die in Yemen every year before their fifth birthday.

Nor can we ignore the dismal reality that women face in Yemen today, which is a crisis that barely registers on the world's radar. Over half a million pregnant women lack access to health care that would ensure safe births, and, although notoriously underreported in Yemen, the number of recorded cases of gender-based violence is steadily increasing. And at the time when the burden upon the women of Yemen is increasing, with women the primary providers for nearly a third of all displaced households across the country, over 40 per cent of women-run businesses have closed in the past year.

This paints a very bleak picture, but there is some cause for very cautious optimism. The cessation of hostilities is bringing calm to many areas of the country, reducing the crippling violence that has devastated communities. In addition, following efforts by the United Nations and partners to prepare to scale up operations where possible in anticipation of the cessation of hostilities, humanitarian organizations have begun to respond in areas that were previously difficult to access. For example, in Sa'ada, UNICEF was able to restart the rehabilitation of a water facility in Kitaf district serving some 10,000 people, which had been damaged in air strikes. As a result of the calm, parents in the governorate are also more willing to send their children to school again, and efforts are being undertaken to reopen around 100 schools. And unlike in previous efforts in Sa'ada, the calm has allowed for vaccination teams to go door to door, increasing the number of children reached.

In Ta'izz City, one of the most severely affected by hostilities, three mobile health and nutrition teams have been deployed, including to districts in the enclave, and partners will be delivering medical supplies for over 130,000 people. Some 240,000 people are now receiving food assistance in the Al Jawf, Al Dhale'e and Ta'izz governorates. As the cessation of hostilities continues to strengthen, the humanitarian community will similarly increase assistance on the ground in the most affected areas.

At the same time, United Nations agencies and partners continue to ramp up ongoing relief efforts across the country. Coinciding with the start of the cessation of hostilities, a nationwide polio vaccination campaign targeting around 5 million children was successfully launched with the support of UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the World Bank. This extraordinary effort has involved more than 19,000 mobile vaccination teams of over 46,000 health workers and some 5,000 vehicles that were rented to facilitate monitoring across all governorates. Around 3.5 million people are receiving food assistance each month from the World Food Programme. So far this

year, around 2.2 million people have been reached with health interventions in 22 governorates through the procurement of medicines, the provision of trauma kits, immunizations, and the maintaining of an uninterrupted supply-chain management system. Some 2.3 million people have been reached with emergency water and sanitation programmes, and United Nations Population Fund has this month established two shelters in Yemen where survivors of gender-based violence can receive legal, psychosocial and health services.

Millions of fearful, innocent civilians across Yemen, on whichever side of the conflict lines they reside, are being reached, and lives are being saved. But this is hardly enough. The cessation of hostilities must be made to hold.

Despite these efforts by humanitarian agencies, vital operations continue to be hampered by a variety of bureaucratic impediments, principally by the authorities on the ground. Missions are frequently cancelled due to lack of clearance. Interference with implementing-partner selection is common. There has been no headway in negotiating the start of the nationwide emergency food-security and nutrition assessment, which has been blocked for seven months now, and there remain long lists of critical humanitarian supplies sitting in warehouses or in ports awaiting clearance by the authorities. These include United Nations armoured vehicles, along with approximately 100 protective vests and helmets required for United Nations staff to expand and operate safely, particularly on missions outside Sana'a.

Progress is also required towards simplifying the current deconfliction mechanism with the coalition. For operations to meaningfully expand during the cessation and beyond, as well as for existing humanitarian relief efforts to consistently reach those most in need, these impediments must be immediately removed.

In that context, I underscore that the terms for the cessation of hostilities not only include a halt in hostilities but also obligate the parties to allow unhindered humanitarian assistance. I remind all parties that this facilitation is an obligation under international humanitarian law. While air strikes, rockets and ground fighting indiscriminately kill civilians, these administrative obstacles are only nominally less devastating, as they directly contribute to hunger, sickness, deprivation and death.

Operations are also being impacted financially. Now into the second quarter of 2016, the Yemen humanitarian response plan remains critically underfunded, at only 16 per cent. To date, $296 million has been received against the $1.8 billion requested. In order for humanitarian agencies, both United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations, to continue their work, more funding is required now. Because it is so critical that this assistance reach everyone in need across the country with impartiality, it is important that funding be given through the humanitarian response plan released earlier this year.

Commercial imports have notably decreased over the past two months, primarily because of delays in the coalition clearance process, in particular for vessels trying to reach the port at Al Hudaydah. Delays in the delivery of commercial goods into Yemen have a direct humanitarian consequence. Constricting the pipeline of food, fuel and medical supplies into the country means that less will be available for civilian consumption and that what is delivered will be available only at an inflated price. For example, in February, only 15 per cent of the monthly fuel requirement was delivered, while food imports fell by a quarter. As a consequence, prices rose and civilians faced greater hardship.

The Steering Committee of the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) met for the first time on 11 April, to be followed by a second meeting on 18 April. In the past 12 hours, the representative from the Government of Yemen to the Steering Committee affirmed to the United Nations that the Government of Yemen had agreed to the UNVIM head office being located in Djibouti. It is now a matter of urgency that, during the upcoming meeting, UNVIM be fully operationalized as a single mechanism for the clearance of commercial vessels into Yemen. To delay further will have far-reaching consequences, increasing the already severe humanitarian needs.

Despite the overwhelming human tragedy that characterizes Yemen today, we maintain hope that the parties to the conflict will choose the only path to a solution, namely, negotiation and dialogue over the coming weeks, no matter how challenging that path may seem. There is no military solution. We will continue to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need, but what is needed above all in Yemen is peace — peace for nearly three and a half million children, the country's next generation, to return to school; for the displaced to return home; for livelihoods to recover and for the

rebuilding of social service infrastructure, heritage sites and communities.

For the people of Yemen, peace is not something abstract; it is vital to their survival. I call on the parties to redouble their commitment to finding a negotiated political settlement to the conflict, and call upon all Member States and the Council to continue to support such genuine efforts. Meanwhile, as the process develops, we cannot simply wait and hope. Action is required. Parties to the conflict must recognize their responsibility to protect the civilians of Yemen and facilitate the unfettered delivery of impartial aid to the people in need. Similarly, the delivery of commercial goods to the country must be better managed through the UNVIM process to relieve the acute price and availability pressures on daily necessities. Building barriers around the people of Yemen — through access restrictions, delivery delays or visa denials for humanitarian staff — is not in the interest of peace or of the Yemeni people. It will prolong the suffering of those in need and drive more and more communities into real and life-threatening risk. The cessation of hostilities is a crucial window of action, both for the parties to the conflict to consider peace and for those civilians caught in its grasp to receive much-needed aid.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Kang for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alyemany (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to convey our gratitude to the members of the Security Council for their ongoing efforts and attention to the issue of Yemen through their scrupulous following of the peace process in my country. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has paid particular attention to the crisis in Yemen through his Special Adviser on Yemen, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed, and his working team.

Significant efforts have been undertaken to ensure the success of the political talks in Kuwait in order to make progress on a comprehensive solution to the conflict and to prevent any backsliding. The Government of the Yemeni Republic has extended an olive branch and worked in a constructive manner to support United Nations efforts to achieve a lasting peace and put an end to unilateral measures that undermine the political solution, a process that has been organized by the United Nations since 2011. Today, we are working with the United Nations team to ensure the success of the talks with the putschists, which are to be held in the brotherly country of Kuwait in the days to come. Those talks, in the eyes of the Yemeni people and observers, are the last chance for peace in the country.

The convening of the Yemeni talks in Kuwait are symbolic in many ways. Kuwait is an active member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which has not abandoned Yemen in its darkest hours. It has organized numerous inter-Yemeni dialogue events during the conflict in Yemen. Our patient and resilient people await the talks in Kuwait in order to achieve lasting peace and agreements that bring new life to the changes under way in the country, in the light of the GCC Initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue and the relevant Security Council resolutions, namely, resolution 2216 (2015).

Our people support the urgent humanitarian actions undertaken to begin the rebuilding and economic recovery period to put an end to this coup d'état nightmare, which has ripped apart the country's social fabric and led civilians to flee.

We reiterate the Yemeni Government's support for the efforts undertaken by the Special Adviser and his team. We call upon the international community to provide all forms of support necessary to the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General and his Office. The process conducted by the United Nations is the only one we support because of its clear agenda and terms of reference, which were drawn up together with the GCC Initiative; the outcomes of the National Dialogue and Security Council resolutions, such as resolution 2216 (2015); and other relevant United Nations resolutions, which summarize the outcomes of the Bonn negotiations.

After five days of the cessation of hostilities, the De-escalation and Coordination Committee began its work in Kuwait on 3 April. It has received several reports regarding attacks perpetrated by the Houthi and pro-Saleh militias against Ta'izz City and its inhabitants, which are aimed at forcing them to submit and which target civilians and densely populated cities with Katyusha rockets and mortar fire. The Al-Wazia region in Ta'izz has been besieged by putschists and Houthis, who continue with their goal of opening a new fronts. This demonstrates clearly to the international community that these individuals refuse the transition to peace and think that violence can benefit them at the negotiating table. However, that is an illusion.

The same thing is happening in Sana'a, the beloved capital of Yemen, which has been transformed by putschist militias into an open-air prison. Thousands of people — be they politicians, military officers, intellectuals, journalists and activists — have all fallen subject to many forms of physical and psychological torture. We are waiting for the Houthis and pro-Saleh elements to act in good faith, before the talks in Kuwait begin, and free prisoners, as this nightmare has lasted far too long. On behalf of my people, the resilient Yemeni people, we ask the Houthis and the pro-Saleh elements to choose peace and put an end to the bloodletting in order to save my country, Yemen.

As we head to Kuwait, we wait for peace to return to Yemen and for the militias that control the State to return to the negotiating table. A society built on the rule of law, a unified State, a State of justice and equality must not accept a State within a State or the existence of militia bearing arms in Yemen.

We call upon the Security Council and the United Nations to reject the interference of Iran and its terrorist affiliates in the region, which seek to interfere in Yemen's affairs and to destabilize regional security. Iran's interference is clear and hardly needs proof, as heard in the statements of high-ranking Iranian officials who encourage violence by sending weapons to Houthi rebels and to Ali Abdullah Saleh. The most recent examples of that were three arms convoys on 27 February, 20 and 27 March, incidents that were reported by the American authorities and which included Kalishnikov rifles, missiles, shells, rocket launchers and other equipment used to perpetuate the conflict and sow chaos in Yemen and the region, in flagrant violation of the arms embargo pursuant to resolution 2216 (2015).

It has become clear to everyone that there is a relation between the Houthi and Saleh militias. Investigations have been undertaken by the Security Council sanctions committees with regard to the link connecting terrorist networks, Al-Qaida and Da'esh in particular, with regard to the sale of oil and arms trafficking.

The Yemeni Government calls on the international community to cooperate in its fight against that terrorism, in particular with regard to the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters and the financing of terrorism. Those two issues are the direct responsibility of the international community. Not dealing with them will result in providing additional resources to terrorist activities in every region throughout the world.

It is appropriate for me to conclude by highlighting the core nature of United Nations activities. There is an extremely important issue at hand, that is, the recruitment of children by the Houthi militias, which put them in harm's way and use them as cannon fodder for their unjust wars against the Yemini people. The Houthi and Saleh coalition of death militias recruit children in the regions that they control, which is an assault on the youth and future generations in Yemen.

Finally, I reiterate our gratitude for all of the efforts that the Council is carrying out, and in Yemen we will never forget those efforts and will record them in the our history books.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.